

Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1995 to 1998

A CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION FACTSHEET



As the number of California high school graduates continues to rise over the next 10 years, demand for postsecondary education is expected to increase as well. It also is anticipated that the changing social, cultural, and academic characteristics and expectations of entering students will both challenge and enhance California colleges and universities.

This fact sheet describes important changes in the academic characteristics of recent high school graduates that relate directly to university eligibility and student preparation.

College preparatory curriculum

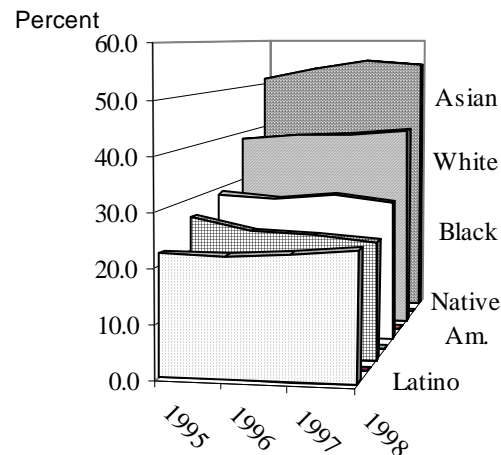
The freshman admission criteria of the California State University and the University of California require applicants to complete nearly identical college preparatory curricula. Since 1994, public high schools have reported annually the proportion of graduates who complete the full set of university required courses with a "C" grade or better. Although the number of public high school graduates has grown by 9.7 percent since 1995, the proportion of graduates who completed the full university college-preparatory curricula increased by 16.3 percent -- from 34.9 percent in 1995 to 51.2 percent in 1998.

Equally noteworthy, the proportion of high school graduates who completed the college-preparatory curricula increased among students from all racial-ethnic groups, though the rates varied substantially, as illustrated in Display 1. In 1998 for example, 55 percent of Asian graduates and 40 percent of White graduates completed the university-preparatory curricula, whereas only 29 percent of Black graduates, 24 percent of Latino graduates, and 23 percent of Native American students did so.

Advanced Placement participation

Another indicator of changes in the preparation level of students for college is the increasing number and pro-

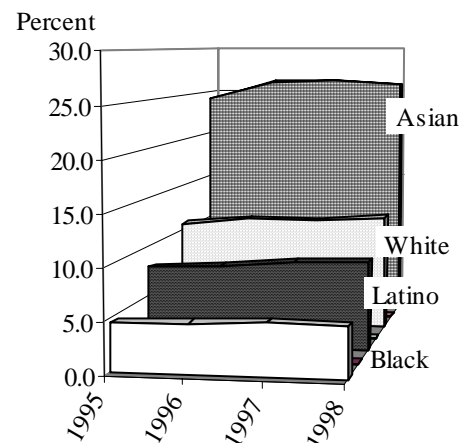
DISPLAY 1 Proportion of Public High School Graduates Completing a College Preparatory Curriculum, 1995 to 1998



portion of California public high school twelfth graders who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses and tests. Earning a score of "3" or better on AP tests may qualify a student for college credit.

Between 1995 and 1998, the percentage of graduates who completed AP examinations went up from 12.7 percent to 14.1. Large disparities continue to persist, however, in AP participation by racial-ethnic group, as shown in Display 2. In 1998, for example, the AP par-

DISPLAY 2 Proportion of California Public High School Twelfth Graders in Advanced Placement Examinations, 1995 to 1998



participation rate for Asian test takers was nearly twice the overall rate of 14.1 percent, whereas the AP rate for Black graduates was less than half the overall rate.

Participation and performance on college admissions tests

California public universities require first-time freshmen applicants to submit scores for either the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT 1) or the American College Test (ACT).

Due in part to the burgeoning size of the State's public and private high school graduating class, the number of students taking the SAT increased by 12 percent over the reporting period to 142,139, while the number of ACT test takers increased during the same period by 5 percent to 35,396. Displays 3 and 4 show the annual number of SAT 1 and ACT test takers by racial-ethnic group respectively.

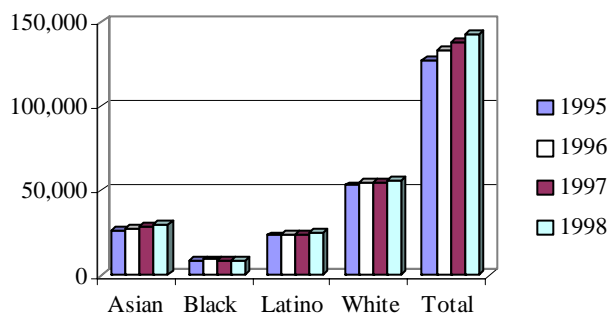
With respect to test performance, the mean SAT Verbal score for California graduates increased between 1995 and 1998 by five points to 497, but it is still below the national mean of 505. California's mean SAT

Math score also rose by five points during the same period to 514 and it is now a few score points above the national Math mean of 512.

Statewide SAT performance, however, appears to be associated to some degree with socioeconomic status, with students from higher income families scoring better than students from less affluent families. For example, the mean SAT Verbal score for California students from families with a combined income of more than \$100,000 was 557, while the mean SAT Math score for the same income group was 576.

Over the past three years, the mean ACT Composite score for California public and private graduates edged up 0.3 points to 21.2, now slightly above the national mean of 21.0. The ACT Composite score is the sum of the English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning sections of the ACT. Like the SAT, the ACT also appears to be associated with socioeconomic status. For example, the mean Composite score for students from families with a combined income of more than \$100,000 was 23.8, in comparison to the overall mean of 21.2.

DISPLAY 3 *California SAT 1 Tests Takers, 1995 to 1998*



DISPLAY 4 *California ACT Test Takers, 1995 to 1998*

